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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003751

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: DA'WA RISING IN THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS?

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3744  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3722  
[1](#)C. BAGHDAD 3655  
[1](#)D. BAGHDAD 3614  
[1](#)E. BAGHDAD 3562

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Prime Minister Maliki's Da'wa party appears poised to make gains in the provincial elections in Najaf and Wasit provinces at the expense of its Baghdad coalition partner, ISCI. November meetings between Senior Advisor Gray and candidates in these provinces indicate that almost everyone expects Da'wa to do well there -- and throughout the south-central region -- despite a lack of genuine public enthusiasm for Maliki or his party. In their efforts to build winning coalitions, Da'wa is reaching out in all directions, ranging from secular tribal leaders to hard-line Sadrists. End summary.

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ISCI vs. Da'wa  
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[1](#)2. (C) In the provincial elections, scheduled for early 2009, Da'wa and its longtime Baghdad coalition partner ISCI will be competing as the lead party on rival national coalition lists, in addition to competing on province-specific coalitions in most provinces. The membership of each national list indicates how the parties are growing apart. Da'wa has attracted a multi-sectarian band of nationalists, Shi'a religious parties, and ethnic minorities. ISCI, meanwhile, continues to focus on being Iraq's primary Shi'a religious party. The Da'wa-led national coalition list, titled the "Rule of Law" Coalition, is comprised of Da'wa, Da'wa Tanzim, Solidarity in Iraq, the Islamic Union for Turkomen, the Akha Iraqi Kurdish Alfeli, the Iraq Popular Uprising of 1991, and independents. The ISCI-led "List of Martyrs and Independents" comprises ISCI, the Badr Organization, Hezbollah in Iraq, the Lord of the Martyrs Islamic Movement, and independents.

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Wasit and Najaf  
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[1](#)3. (C) Gray's November 17-18 meetings in Najaf showed the growth of Da'wa even in ISCI's base province. Da'wa will challenge ISCI through the province-specific "Loyalty to Najaf" coalition list, which includes a wide range of "independents," many of them tribal sheikhs with pre-arranged loyalties (ref E). Dr. Nizar al-Naffakh, the top candidate on this list, told Gray that his coalition earned nine seats on the Provincial Council (PC) in the last provincial elections and had gained members since. Gray later met with Sheikh Fayed al-Shimmeri, a former PC

Chairman with ISCI who recently switched to Da'wa, reportedly because of a falling-out with ISCI Deputy Governor (and current candidate for Governor) Abtan. Fayed, flanked by two Da'wa PC members and an independent PC member running under the Loyalty to Najaf banner, criticized Abtan for widespread corruption. Fayed, a religious sheikh, believed that the marja'iyah would stay neutral through the campaign to avoid misuse of their name and image, but that they would indicate shortly before the election who they favored as candidates.

¶4. (C) In Wasit, Da'wa has similarly built support with sheikhs and tribal leaders. In November 9 meetings with Gray, the Governor, the PC Chairman, and a Sadrism PC member concurred on the following points: ISCI and Da'wa are the best organized parties in Wasit, Da'wa is gaining, independent candidates will receive the most votes, and relevant independent candidates are all aligned with a specific party or coalition. PC Chairman Hassan Jabbar, an independent who is not running for re-election, emphasized the difference between Wasit's rural voters, who are influenced by tribal affiliation, and its urban voters, influenced by tribal affiliation, and its urban voters, heavily influenced by religion. He confirmed that Da'wa has made inroads in both areas, especially due to the influence of Sheikh Mohammed Reda al-Numani, an influential Sadrism and tribal leader who is also a strong friend of the Prime Minister from their exile days in Iran (ref B).

¶5. (C) E'barah, the Sadrism PC member, expressed similar views on the Da'wa-ISCI relationship. He also spoke at length about the fractures among Sadrists (ref D), which led E'barah to run on a Sadrism list (Liberation Trend) separate from the list preferred by the Office of the Martyr

BAGHDAD 00003751 002 OF 002

Sadr (OMS) leadership in Najaf. The fractures among Sadrists have given Da'wa an opportunity to reach out to Sadrism voters, who generally don't have the same antipathy toward Da'wa that they have toward ISCI's Badr militia. (E'barah described Badr as "the Iranians," and commented that it is inappropriate for followers of Muqtada al-Sadr to join the Iraqi Police, in part because of the strong Badr presence there.)

¶6. (C) Governor Latif Hamid Turfah, an independent with an evident strong relationship with Prime Minister Maliki, confirmed to Gray that he will run for re-election next year. Both Da'wa and ISCI members have claimed in November meetings with Gray that the Governor belongs to their party.

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Support Council Impact  
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¶7. (C) Support Councils (SC) have been one of the primary organizing tools for Da'wa in Wasit, Najaf, and the south-central provinces as a whole. Organized and funded through the Prime Minister's office, tribal leaders and technocrats belonging to the newly formed councils receive monthly payments to advise on security matters (ref A). Councils have shown an increased willingness to show their colors in support of Maliki. On November 19, Najaf tribal leaders held a demonstration in support of the Prime Minister's initiatives. On November 20, Sheikh Numani and SC members organized a march in favor of the SOFA (ref B). Not all SC members have pledged support to Da'wa, however. Tribal sheikhs in Najaf representing the al-Yasir, al-Ibrahim, and al-Fatlah tribes told Gray that they belong to the local Prime Minister-funded Council, but that they are running on the Independent Tribes and Sons of Najaf coalition list instead of the Da'wa-backed coalition list. (Comment: These sheikhs have expressed to the Provincial Reconstruction Team considerable animosity toward the ISCI government in recent months, so they may still partner with Da'wa on the Provincial Council, if elected. End comment.)

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Da'wa Still a Religious Party?  
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18. (C) The Da'wa push to reach out to tribal leaders has made the party more nationalistic in outlook. As a case in point, the Da'wa governor in Karbala, who enjoys broad tribal support, recently risked the ire of the Iranian Consulate by approving a large price increase on Iranian religious pilgrims (ref D). Many Iraqis in the region have echoed PC Chairman Jabbar's comment to poloff that Da'wa does not even appear to be a religious party anymore. At the same time, however, Da'wa has increased its efforts to reach out to Sadrist in Wasit, Najaf, and elsewhere. Da'wa-affiliated sheikhs with religious credentials, such as Numani in Wasit and Fayed in Najaf, play a strong role in appealing to moderate Sadrists with nationalist leanings. While Fayed did not confirm to Gray reports that his coalition had reached an unspoken agreement to work with candidates backed by the Office of the Martyr Sadr after the election, he indicated that discussions with them are continuing. In Wasit, thanks to Numani, the relationship is much more open. As Jabbar told Gray, "It is a fact that many (followers of Sadr) will vote for Da'wa."

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Comment: A Mile Wide and an Inch Thin  
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19. (C) Aside from anecdotal evidence, available polling also suggests that Da'wa is gaining at the expense of ISCI and other religious parties. An October MNF-I survey indicates that 18.6 percent of all Iraqis plan to vote for Da'wa or Da'wa Tanzim, whereas only 5.4 percent plan to vote QDa'wa or Da'wa Tanzim, whereas only 5.4 percent plan to vote ISCI or Badr. Among Iraq's primarily Shi'a parties, only the Iraqi National List (Iraqiyah) attracts even half of Da'wa's level of support (13.7 percent). Despite this momentum, meetings with tribal and other leaders consistently show that voters are less than enthusiastic about supporting Maliki. Many simply appear to be joining the team that is winning. If the Prime Minister takes steps that raise additional concerns with voters who view Da'wa as the lesser of the evils, their high public support levels may yet erode quickly in advance of provincial elections. End comment.  
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